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An exploration into constructed space

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An Exploration into Constructed Space

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I. Introduction

The child sits contently with a look of intense concentration as he strings blocks together in a zig zag pattern that snakes across the floor in a rainbow of colors. His design creates a labyrinth of open passageways and dead ends for his characters to explore. As the city grows, the infrastructure exposed by the blocks remains as he builds homes and storefronts. Even at a young age, the child understands how to design according to the systems and procedures within a structured and ordered society. He is subconsciously aware of the grid which dictates movement through the systems of roads, sidewalks, buildings, and public spaces. Just as the child builds a city using the geometry of the urban environment, invisible systems of infrastructure and control exist in every man-made space.[1]

Whether it be conventions of culture, city, government, or company, every designed space is built upon pre-established customs and codes. In many cases, inhabitants of the built environment tend to overlook these underlying grid systems which influence mundane actions. The infrastructure of modern society is predicated upon directed movement and manufactured experience. From walking along a sidewalk, driving in the lane, turning on the light, to getting groceries, our actions are mediated by social laws and conventions. These are evident in the undercurrents of an energy grid, in the layout of a supermarket, and in the repetition of flashing billboards along a highway.

Because constructed space is so pervasive, it is important to understand the role design often plays in controlling movement while rendering itself invisible. Marketing and design for the tourist industry represent the optimal example of this as they operate within the context of an evolving social

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[1] Nato Thompson, "In Two Directions: Geography as Art and Art as Geography," *Experimental Geography*, (Brooklyn, NY, New York: Melville House: Independent Curators International), 2008. 13-26.

structure, incorporating sensory elements and engrained physiological responses to shape an individual's concept of space. I want to uncover how the tourism industry both embodies and exploits this social and evolutionary framework to influence individual and collective perceptions of space. Tourism media meticulously crafts an image that influences not only the final experience in a place, but also what is collectively considered to be of value or *worth seeing.*

In his doctoral dissertation and graphic novel, *Unflattening*, Nick Sousanis questions the concepts of perspective and awareness. He advocates the need for a new, altered perspective to "discover new ways of seeing."[2] In one example, he asks the reader to hold up a finger and look at it with one eye closed, and then to alternate and close the other eye. He points out that the finger has changed position and asks which perspective is correct. Sousanis concludes that there is no single correct view. It is this displacement, or parallax, that allows us to perceive depth.[3] Our stereoscopic vision is the integration of two views—a constant negotiation between two distinct sources. Physically, while our eyes form our primary perceptual link, we are concurrently stimulated by auditory, olfactory, and tactile input. Mentally, "we are constantly making comparisons, evaluating and contextualizing"[4] our perspective with millions of others. This synthesis of each respective sense constitutes perception. The finger test represents on a smaller scale how we engage with a space through our senses, taking in multiple perspectives and integrating them to form a perception. This sensory awareness is integral to an understanding of an individual's physical relationship within a space.

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[2] Nick Sousanis, "The Importance of Seeing Double and Then Some," in *Unflattening*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 27.

[3] Ibid, 31.

[4] Ibid, 72.

In addition to one's perceptual sense of space, built spaces represent the preexisting structures that society has established. In an effort to transform the complexity and chaos of the natural world into relative simplicity and order, bodies of power establish systems of control via human and environmental management. Sousanis reflects on the segmentation of thought and movement by illustrating that social systems compartmentalize space, time, and experience.[5] Over generations, systems of directed movement become internalized and serve as a filtered lens through which we perceive the world. Thus, physical and perceptual space is flattened, but a gap remains.

The gap between the material and the sensory represents an incompleteness that requires a reckoning between the individual and their environment. The gap reveals a space that the individual fills with imagination, discovery, and new vantage points.[6] Design temporarily satisfies this gap, giving the individual a sense of completeness. This connects to our attraction to tourist destinations that advertise a grand spectacle. Therefore, a place can be more clearly understood by an individual if they are aware of the systems that influence their material and sensory experience within it.[7]

However, the gap does not exist if there is only one vantage point from which to see and perceive. Tourism presents the tourist with a single perspective, a simplified reality that strips the viewer of the ability to critically comprehend a stereoscopic view. It is as if they are stuck with one eye closed, barred from perceiving depth granted by the integration of visual information from autonomous

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[5] Ibid, 150.

[6] Ibid, 90.

[7] Yoko Akama, "A ' Way of Being ' in Design: Zen and the Art of Being a Human-Centered Practitioner." *Design Philosophy Papers* (Crows Nest Vol. 10, Issue. 1), May 2012, 63-80.

perceptual and physical awareness. Modern tourism leverages physical layout through pathways, signage, maps, and attractions/spectacles to manipulate the individual's overall perception of space. Simultaneously, modern tourist destinations strive to provide the visitor with a full experience that includes dramatic displays, ambient sound, delectable food and smells, and a narrative arc that attempts to mask the location's linear nature.[8] The constructed experience is so powerful that it affects the tourist's perception before, during, and after visiting the destination, coloring direct experience.

Tourism has evolved over time from "gaping and marveling" at an attraction from a witness standpoint to directly involving oneself in every sensory aspect of the destination.[9] While still presenting a spectacle, the intentional production of a curated and marketable experience in a location objectifies that experience,[10] into a "dematerialized commodity that generates increasing returns."[11] Instead of being seen as the context by which a location is understood, it becomes the content that the visitor consumes. Experience can be either passive or active and is divided into four categories: entertainment (passive), education (active), escapist (active), and aesthetic (passive).[12] A successful tourist location will incorporate all four elements, finding a "sweet spot," tied directly to the aims of the location while still meeting the diverse needs of its consumers.[13]

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[8] Dora Agapito, et al, "Exploring the conceptualization of the sensory dimension of tourist experiences," *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management* (Vol. 2, Issue 2, June 2013), 62-73.

[9] Richard Butler, "The Evolution of Tourism and Tourism Research," *Tourism Recreation Research*, (40:1), 2015, 16-27, DOI: 10.1080/02508281.2015.1007632

[10] Yeoryios Stamboulis and Pantoleon Skayannis, "Innovation Strategies and Technology for Experience-Based Tourism," *Tourism Management*, 2003, 35–43.

[11] Ibid.

[12] J.B. Pine II and J.H. Gilmore, "Welcome to the Experience Economy," Harvard Business Review, (76 [4]), 1998, 97-105.

[13] Ibid.

My goal as a designer is not to negatively portray all designed spaces. I acknowledge that all man-made spaces are designed, or intentionally constructed for a specific purpose to meet a need and infused with culture and identity in some way.[14] This is not inherently bad. Designed spaces are necessary for the functioning and improvement of society. Constructed spaces become detrimental when individuals are unaware of the effect the design has on their interpretation of space, and when a mindful awareness of one's position in space is replaced with a mindless acceptance of the organized experience. When their experience is altered, they are now forced to see the space in a different way. This limits a diversity of viewpoints and instead directs all viewpoints to one preordained outcome and perception. While constructed space does not outright reject alternative viewpoints, it also does not encourage them.

II. Defining Space, Place, and Mindfulness

Before considering the implications of constructed space on perception, one must understand the role space, place, and mindfulness play within the context of a constructed space. An understanding of space in the physical sense is linked to conceptions of power. Space can either be considered as context or as a text.[15] Space as context refers to space by its material constraints or containment that enables a specific organization; in other words, space is viewed by its direct or indirect effect on human behavior or movement.[16] Space as text refers to "space as a set of dialectical dimensions," meaning that it can be

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[14] Charlie Grantham, "How Culture Can Turn Your Space Into A Place," *Work Design Magazine*, May 2017, https://www.workdesign.com/2017/05/culture-can-turn-space-place/.

[15] Marco Berti, et al, "Making a place out of space: The social imaginaries and realities of a Business School as a designed space," *Management Learning* (2018, Vol. 49(2)), Sage Journals, 170.

[16] Ibid, 170.

activated by social engagement and goes beyond the surface material.[17] Once a space is defined in terms of its sensory factors and its impact on the individual experience within it, the designer has the power to either reveal the apparatus or conceal it according to their motives. A space is inevitably defined by the individual's experience within it, but the degree of intervention by the designer, the compounded effect on said experience, and the extent to which that intervention is recognized, is an important distinction when defining a constructed space.

Place, as opposed to space, implies the residing presence or trace of a human, meaning that it is a space that is imposed with values and meaning beyond its inherent qualities.[18] As such, placemaking is a form of designed space with the aim of prompting human interaction. Placemaking "situates spaces in particular meanings;"[19] it makes room for the identities of occupants and visitors within a space. If the designer's goal is placemaking, then they must communicate a sense of authority and legitimacy through commercial design and marketing. For example, when a space is designed and there is signage or wayfinding in place, the audience is more likely to accept the experience as more authentic.[20] Through the deployment of official language or lack thereof, legitimacy of the value of a place is either confirmed or called into question.

Whether through the authorized language of design or through less overt means, influencing behavior in a constructed place is a complex process which takes time and involves socio-political power structures and individual action within a context. Making a distinction between space and

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[17] Ibid, 170.

[18] Ibid, 172.

[19] Ibid, 172.

[20] Mark A. Foltz, "Designing Navigable Information Spaces," (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) 1998.

place, Marco Berti, et al explain that "place is an ongoing accomplishment rather than the mechanical consequence of a managerial change initiative."[21] For example, in the renovation of a building, identity associations can shift, but continue to be indirectly affected by "the power relations" that "voice certain affordances and silence others."[22] In a subtle shift, the design of the new building reflects the designer's intent and bias; the design itself is infused with marketing or political goals which influence the actions and attitudes of the occupant.

While space and place influence the subconscious mind, mindfulness is the conscious practice of being aware of the outside influences which compete for control over our constructed experience; it is the repositioning of self in relation to the surrounding environment. Mindfulness has become a buzzword, spurring a Western interest in Eastern mysticism, Buddhist philosophy, and the practice of meditation.[23] Beyond the self-oriented meditational practice, a variety of sources define mindfulness as an understanding of the external influences that act upon the senses to affect one's reality. In a society that demands constant attention, it is easy to become distracted, perfunctory, and unobservant. Tourism presents reality constructed through over-sensationalized, over-saturated imagery, and creates unrealistic expectations of place, making it impossible for the individual to have an unmediated experience. Mindful design situates the locus of control from external to internal, allowing viewers to make conscious decisions and be more aware of their environment.[24] To

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[21] Ibid, 180.

[22] Ibid, 180.

[23] Maja Djikic, "Art of Mindfulness: Integrating Eastern and Western Approaches," *The Wiley Blackwell Handbook of Mindfulness*, edited by Amanda Ie, et al (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.), 2014.

[24] Dr. Kristina Niedderer, "Mindful Design as a Driver for Social Behaviour Change," in Consilience and Innovation Design- Proceedings of the 5th International IASDR Conference 2013. Tokyo, Japan. 26-30. August 2013.

implement mindfulness in design is to expand possibilities for the individual to feel connected and position themselves empathetically with the world around them.[25]

III. Ma 間

The Japanese emphasize the relationship between space, place, time, and the individual's interaction within and with these elements with *ma*. By direct translation, the Japanese character ma means negative or empty space. The written glyph for ma is a composite of two ideogrammatic characters: the first for gate and the second for moon underneath. As Japanese characters represent ideas, this glyph represents the delicate and fleeting moment of moonlight streaming through the cracks in a gateway, capturing both time and space.[26] With ma, space is integral to the concept of place. Norberg-Schulz explains, "In [our] understanding of nature we [...] recognize the origin of the concept of space as a system of places."[27] Place is built from the human experiences within space. Ma takes this concept and combines space as context and text, incorporating both the physical aspects of control and geography with the conceptual aspects of meaning and identity.

Ma has various meanings when applied within different contexts. One such context means the space between Tokyo and Kyoto, and denotes not only distance, but also recognizes the two points as "individual units," —a linear journey from beginning to end.[28] Japanese printmaker Utagawa Hiroshige captured the various nuances of ma in his series of wood prints, "The Fifty-Three Stations of

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[25] Akama, 63-80.

[26] Gunter Nitschke, "Ma: Place, Space, Void," *Kyoto Journal*, 16 May 2018, https://www.kyotojournal.org/culture-arts/ma-place-space-void/.

[27] Christian Norberg-Schulz, Genius Loci — *Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (Rizzoli, New York) 1980.

[28] Nitschke.

the Tōkaidō." In 1832, inspired by his numerous trips with an entourage of the shogun's officials along the imperial road known as the Tōkaidō, Hiroshige documented the beauty of everyday life along the road.[29] Along the 300-mile path, the government designated 53 stations as rest stops for travelers.[30] Before Hiroshige's prints were published in 1836, the road was primarily utilitarian. The towns and provinces the Tōkaidō passed through contained temples, shops, and inns for travelers. Hiroshige's prints were widely popular when they were individually released in the early 1830's. As a result of his prints, the towns became significant tourist destinations.[31] Since then, Hiroshige's prints have gained world renown, creating a mythology around the Tōkaidō road that prompts travelers from around the globe to visit the road themselves to see the scenes depicted in the prints.

Figure A: Utagawa Hiroshige, from the series "The Fifty-Three Stations of the Tokaido," Japan, Edo period, 1834, woodblock print, Dallas Museum of Art.

[29] "The Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō," Dallas Museum of Art, 2019, https://dma.org/Tokaido.

[30] FLLW Tokaido, "Wright's Tokaido," YouTube video, 36:05, 18 Nov 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slaLKpqLruQ&ab_channel=FLLWTokaido.

[31] Ibid.

Utagawa Hiroshige's numerous journeys along the imperial route were, in effect, exercises in mindfulness as he took in the surrounding life along the road from various angles, incorporating his perceptual experience with the physical layout and linearity of the conventional road. Hiroshige's prints employ a fundamental principle of mindfulness: awareness of one's surrounding environment. As Hiroshige's prints were widely distributed and sold inexpensively, they attracted tourists to the Tōkaidō road simply to see and recreate Hiroshige's exercise in mindfulness. In effect, the prints commodified mindfulness. His prints created a new perception of place that shaped how others saw it before, during, and after traveling the Tōkaidō.

Following my own Tōkaidō road on the route from my home in Nashville, Tennessee, to my university in Chattanooga, I am witness to a system of signs that bears a striking resemblance to the 53 stations of the Imperial road. Along my route, I see billboards advertising in bold letters "See Rock City" and am reminded of the barns which dotted the southern landscape following early interstate highways in the 1950's. Rock City was founded by Garnet Carter in 1932, and in 1937, in an effort to attract travelers, he hired Clark Byers to paint the roofs of country barns, sheds, and other buildings along the highway system. Using iconic bold, white lettering on black, Byers painted "See Rock City" on more than 900 barns and buildings in 19 states from Florida to Michigan, effectively making Rock City a symbol of southern Americana.[32]

[32] Chloe Morrison, "80 years of "See Rock City" barns," *NoogaToday*, 18 June 2015, https://noogatoday.6amcity.com/80-years-of-see-rock-city-barns/.

Figure B: Clark Byers | Chloe Morrison, "80 years of "See Rock City" barns," *NoogaToday*, 18 June 2015, https://noogatoday.6amcity.com/80-years-of-see-rock-city-barns/.

Rock City is an example of how tourism constructs an image and builds an experience based on the spectacle. It is also a great example of a linear trail that guides the visitor in a directed mindfulness exercise. I spoke with Will Jackson, the Senior Manager of Innovation at Rock City, about how signage has adapted over time and how messages are articulated across different platforms. Jackson described Rock City's aim is to provide a pause from the chaotic clutter of everyday life and to encourage a closeness to and awareness of nature. He explained that in order to do this, the trail in Rock City is dotted with details that "encourage people to take in all of the small nuances of the place."[33] Although the trail is linear, the goal of Rock City is to have the visitor experience it in a non-linear way, to prompt discovery and encourage exploration.[34] However, this encouraged exploration is within the

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[33] Will Jackson (senior manager of innovations at Rock City), in discussion with the author, March 2021, transcript and recording available at https://www.temi.com/editor/t/HZYqpbTSF7yThs62T9qKCbKE3VYnzTx7dCYVNrh4zRjLNaxuDBoD-jNUZ0RAJ0jl_y_0Q1UvH1nlaBAEgaGSFvCYlbU?

[34] Ibid.

boundaries of the stone path, guided by wayfinding signs, red doors, and archways. Jackson emphasized the importance of facilitating an immersive experience within the space as a means of maximizing value. He described that in order to do this, the designers behind a "must see" location need to show the beauty to the visitor by framing it in a way that the visitor can understand.[35] Will Jackson's explanation of the goals of Rock City and its methods of execution make it clear that the space is constructed; the experience is mediated, designed to be perceived in a specific way by the visual campaign which represents it.

IV. Invisible Design

Rock City is an example of a constructed space intended to generate a specific experience, mirroring concepts of Japanese stroll gardens. Both Rock City and stroll gardens exhibit constructed features that are intended to be perceived as natural. In a traditional Japanese stroll garden layout, the placement of tobi-ishi, or "skipping stones," form the garden paths.[36] Through a sophisticated placement of the stones, foot movements can be slowed down, sped up, halted, or turned in various directions. As with movement, the eyes are manipulated, and the visual input from spatial phenomena is structured over time creating a distinct sense of place.[37] Another kind of placement stone utilized in stroll gardens is called the garanseki, which is placed at the junctures where several paths meet and directs the flow of movement through the garden.[38] This sense of place is a veiled experience that appears seamless and natural, but at its core, is completely fabricated.

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Nitschke.

[37] Ibid.

[38] "The Japanese Stroll Garden: A Journey of Time and Space," *Master Garden Products*, 2014, https://www.mastergardenproducts.com/gardenerscorner/japanese_stroll_garden.htm.

Stroll gardens were frequently commissioned by Japanese aristocracy to recreate an exotic location or a scene from a story or tale.[39] In a process of "hiding and revealing [scenes] in turns," or mie-gakure, the visitor is directed along an excursion through a fictional space built within a real space.[40] Each path carefully guides the guest through the garden in stages, recreating a journey designed to transcend time and space. The stroll garden represents a new space being constructed in a way that intentionally surpasses itself, directing the visitor to a location outside the current location, in a time dislocated from the present.

The designers of Rock City extend the concept of a stroll garden to the drive to the attraction itself and modernize the stroll garden within the trail. At the base of Lookout Mountain, the road toward Rock City is lined with signs pointing the traveler directly to the parking lot. After parking, they are directed by more signs, workers, ropes, and the general layout of the buildings. Travelers must then pass through a square that features gift shops and restaurants before entering another building which houses the main gift shop. Having passed through the shop, the visitor can now begin the trail. The trail itself is a rock pathway with signs scattered in strategic locations and hidden speakers playing the sounds of birds chirping and babbling water paired with soothing music as the traveler walks along the path. Will Jackson explained that Rock City was laid out in such a way as to transition from an experience focused purely upon natural elements, to a more "touched" experience in an enchanted and ultimately fantastical way. In what he calls a "blended experience," every step, even the moments of

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[39] Marc Peter Keane, Forward by Preston L. Houser, *Japanese Garden Design*, (Vermont: Tuttle Publishing) 2012.

[40] "The Japanese Stroll Garden: A Journey of Time and Space."

discovery, are intentionally staged, intended to craft a positive and peaceful spatial and sensory experience for the traveler.[41]

When the constructed environment is realized, it disrupts the seamless experience the visitor expects. For example, the speakers hidden off-trail at Rock City form a fissure in the constructed environment that temporarily exposes its constructed nature (Figure C). The more spatial design cues the designer provides on how the visitor is expected to behave in a social space, the less comfortable the visitor feels in undesigned natural spaces. However, as the speakers in Rock City reveal, it is impossible to construct a space that does not contain cracks that expose its fabricated nature, but the audience chooses to ignore the structures for the sake of a comfortable experience.

The aim of Japanese stroll gardens is to be so constructed that it seems natural; it is this art of design effacing itself for content that is similar in many facets to the aims of commercial design. In her seminal text, "The Crystal Goblet," typographer Beatrice Warde argues that good design is like a transparent, crystal wine glass which clearly reveals its substance. She states: "Type well used is invisible as type, just as the perfect talking voice is the unnoticed vehicle for the transmission of words and ideas."[42] Her argument is foundational to the modernist philosophy of design that form follows function. Don Norman, the director of the Design Lab at the University of California, San Diego, wrote in *The Design of Everyday Things*, "Good design is actually a lot harder to notice than poor design, in part because good designs fit our needs so well that the design is invisible."[43] In other words, the viewer

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[41] Jackson.

[42] Beatrice Warde, "The Crystal Goblet" or "Printing Should be Invisible," (London), 1955.

[43] Donald A. Norman, *The Design of Everyday Things*, (New York: Doubleday), 1988, Revised in 2002 and 2013.

should not be cognizant of the design of an object, and the reader should not be aware of the type on a page. As designers, commercial design, including tourism, should function like a Japanese stroll garden, a means of building a specific experience within a given space from a constructed perspective.

V. Critical Views on Space

The dérive offers a critical lens through which to view constructed space as it encourages mindfulness and treats all landscapes as stroll gardens. Peeling back the façade of the built environment is the ultimate aim of the dérive as it unveils invisible design and critiques its effect on movement. The dérive is a practice in which an individual consciously breaks from daily routine to wander through a space and take in the psychogeographic patterns of the terrain through spontaneous movement.[44] Psychogeography refers to how the geographical environment affects an individual's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.[45] Over time, the conscious yet unguided movement of the individual through space begins to reveal the underlying mechanisms upon which the environment is structured and governed. This physical awareness of space, and how it is constructed, influences how individuals perceive the world around them.

In addition to the geographic structures that shape the urban environment, an integral component of the dérive is the social construction of a space, or how it is perceived in the mind of its inhabitants.[46] The dérive reveals subconscious habits that individuals have formed from everyday routine, exposing the mindless tendencies and passive acceptance of control structures. Especially within a post-

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[44] Guy Debord, "Theory of the Dérive," Published in *Internationale Situationniste* #2, 1958.

[45] Thompson, 13-26.

[46] Ibid.

industrialist society, regimentation is a social norm that manifests itself in the grid-like systems of urban streets and directional layout of the Rock City trail.

Debord's criticism of constructed space through the dérive is rooted in what he refers to as the "society of the spectacle."[47] Debord observes that the spectacle actively alters human interactions and relationships. Images influence our lives and beliefs on a daily basis. Advertising manufactures new desires and aspirations. The media interprets (and reduces) the world for the viewer with the use of simple narratives. Photography and film collapses time and geographic distance—providing the illusion of universal connectivity. The spectacle, which is driven by economic interest and profit, replaces lived reality with the "contemplation of the spectacle."[48] Being is replaced by having, and having is replaced by appearing. The proliferation of images and desires alienates us, not only from ourselves, but from each other. Debord references the phrase "lonely crowds,"[49] a term coined by the American sociologist David Riesman, to describe the atomization of individual experience. Debord argues that the spectacle functions as a pacifier for the masses, a tool that reinforces the status quo and quells dissent.[50]

Rock City itself is a spectacle. "Come see the gardens, wonders, and views!" the website encourages,[51] and the promotional materials suggest that there is something about Rock City that transcends individual experience based solely on the nature of its elements. The naming of sites along the trail

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[47] Guy Debord, "The Society of the Spectacle," (New York: Zone Books), 1994. Print.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

[51] See Rock City Homepage, https://www.seerockcity.com/.

such as “Fat Man’s Squeeze” and “Lover’s Leap” implies value and acknowledges a system of authority dictating experience. Like Hiroshige’s “53 Stations of the Tōkaidō,” the representation of a space crafts a perception of place and experience that encourages mindlessness. The viewer no longer has to think critically or see intentionally because they have already been told and shown what is there to discover. The map of Rock City uses naming and a system of abstraction superimposed on photo realism to convey the perceptual significance of a natural space through its modified elements (i.e. a stone trail, wayfinding, landmarks, scenic telescopes at overlooks, art installations). It guides the visitor on a structured walk, with signs directing them to stay on the trail, in a way that mirrors the geometry and directed movement of an urban space.

Figures C-F: Photos from personal visit to Rock City on 5 March 2021.

Using Debord's concept of the dérive to demonstrate how space is constructed through our own eyes and experiences, curator Nato Thompson explores the concepts of experimental geography and psychogeography. He argues that bias seeps into all educational and empirical materials because they are informed by what we believe to be true, resulting in divergences of bias. Through the example of the geocentric model, he examines the politics of mapping and how the mapping of a space exposes power relations and controls the distribution and standardization of knowledge.[52] Through simplifying bodies and abstracting space, mapping assigns value to the places it represents. Maps visually represent this value and by presenting it in a historical or educational frame, perpetuating standards of value over time.

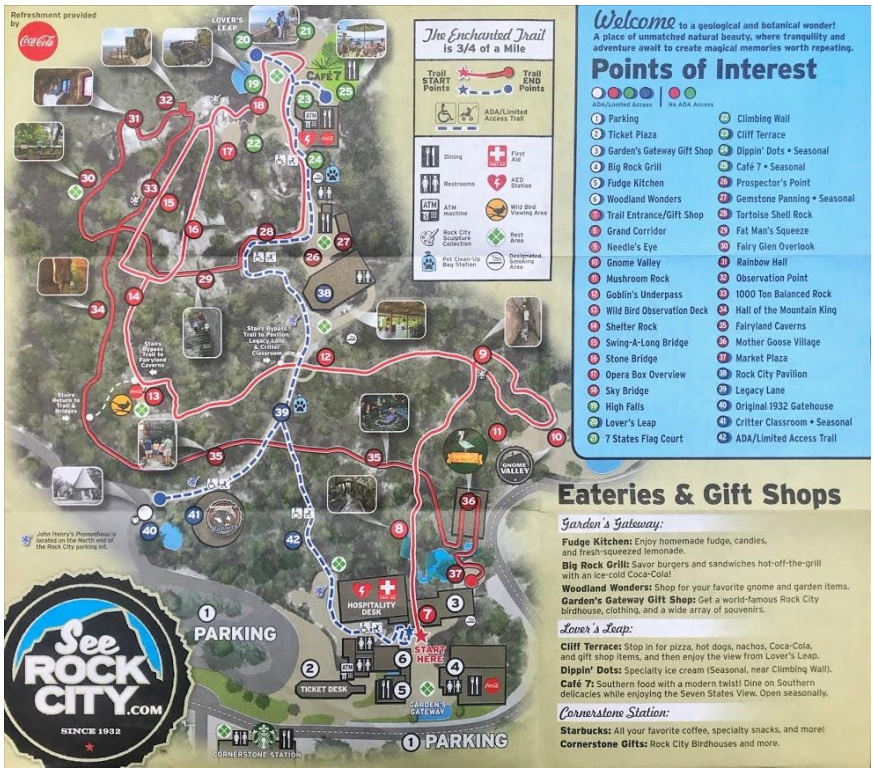

Figure G: Map of Rock City, 2021

[52] Thompson, 13-26.

Maps are a visual representation of the socio-political laws in our built environment as well as our interactions with it. In elementary school, my fifth-grade teacher asked me to draw a map of the quickest route to school from my house. I remember trying to do this from scratch at first, going through the turns and straights in my head, and my pencil ran off the page. Not only that, but my map was highly inaccurate when compared to the MapQuest my mom pulled up later to help me. The final map was made with a ruler and exact measurements, but it also included some important landmarks for me like Nannie Berry Elementary, Kids Kingdom park, and the McDonald's at the intersection before my school. Even though my map was not geographically accurate the first time, it was psychogeographically accurate because that was my perception of the world around me. The MapQuest map was still an artifice, a manifestation of power and value as it ranked landmarks based on an algorithmic formula of significance. As journalist Katherine Harmon points out, maps have their own set of conventions and are generally expected to be "accurate" or true to the spaces they represent.[53] However, every map is inherently biased.[54]

Maps are ubiquitous in modern society. They operate within increasingly complex and increasingly invisible social systems in which human movement is channeled through the built environment. Maps exemplify a designer's power as they are used to present space comprehensibly, to define it in terms of absolutes and social expectations, and to communicate knowledge and power. Thus, maps risk perpetuating oppressive or unequal power dynamics or oversimplifying complex cultural or social issues.[55] Historically, they have served as the means by which individuals or groups in power

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[53] Katharine Harmon, "Introduction," *The Map as Art*, New York, N.Y.: Princeton Architectural Press, 2009.

[54] Thompson, 13-26.

[55]Patricio D'ávila, "Visualizing, Mapping, and Performing Resistance," In *Visualizing, Mapping, and Performing Resistance*. Onomatopee, The Netherlands, 2019, 4-9.

define and determine boundaries. For example, from Christopher Columbus' early writings, cannibalism among the indigenous peoples of the New World was assumed and projected through centuries of maps. Despite the geographic advances in knowledge as explorers gained a more complete understanding of the New World, the imagery of the nude, indigenous cannibal in the margins or unknown areas of the map remained for upwards of a century. This perpetuated a pervasive cultural image of the savage and excluded "the other" who cannot be mapped.[56]

While maps are biased representations of constructed spaces, they are integral to understanding and decoding the invisible systems by which society functions. The map designer plays a key role in determining the extent to which power is used to define boundaries (both physical and perceptual) and to direct movement. Dr. Patricio Dávila, a designer, artist, researcher, and educator at York University, writes that maps "arrange people and things" in a way that seeks to understand a landscape and its inhabitants from the perspective of a colonizer or people in a position of power. He argues that "maps have often been used to control a space and dominate a people."[57] Design holds a similar power, especially in today's social media and technology-reliant society.

Graphic designer and writer Sheila Levrant de Bretteville furthers the idea that simplification of complex spaces is control, while ambiguous representation of spaces is choice. She argues that "we must create visual and physical designs which project social forms but simultaneously we must create

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[56] Allison Meier, "Why Cannibals Were on Every 16th-Century Map of the New World," *Hyperallergic*, 13 Nov. 2015, https://hyperallergic.com/249898/why-cannibals-were-on-every-16th-century-map-of-the-new-world/.

[57] D'ávila, 4.

the social forms which will demand new visual and physical manifestations."[58] Just as mapping represents diagrams of power, so too does spatial design in the form of tourism and placemaking. Rock City chose to simplify space through signage and mapping, exerting power over the visitor's experience by reducing a complex natural space into a sequential progression of movement marked by labeled landmarks.

VI. See Rock City

Tourism sells a place and experience and operates in three stages: exposure, experience, and evaluation. Exposure is the initial search and discovery of the location. This involves the marketing campaign of the location: signage, media promotions, print advertisements, etc. to activate interest in the targeted audience. Experience is when visitors take action to witness the spectacle or purchase the commodity.[59] Evaluation is the stage in which the visitor forms judgments, opinions, and observations based on information collected from the previous stages and analyzes it outside the context of the location.

Branding and identity are key to the exposure stage. Similar to mapping, in order to make a space marketable, its elements must be reduced and simplified into discreet parts to be distributed amongst a segmented audience. In the process of simplification, values are imbued upon the place in terms of revenue and guest participation and attendance. For Rock City, the iconic white on black text painted on barns across southeastern United States is an example of exposure. As the message, "See Rock City"

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[58] Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, "A Reexamination of some Aspects of the Design Arts from the Perspective of a Woman Designer," *Arts in Society: Women and the Arts*, edited by Edward Kamarck, 1974, p. 114-123.

[59] Stamboulis and Skayannis, 35–43.

is repeated in varying formats, the value and significance of the experience is communicated to the passing traveler. Rock City also does this through the distribution of branded objects such as bird houses, ornaments, magnets, stickers, t-shirts, and even rocks.

Selling experience as a commodity involves the creation of a myth and narrative through signs. This myth, "an organized, designed experience and an accompanying narrative,"[60] should directly align with the exposure, experience, and evaluation of a visitor. Tourism, as a commodified experience, is reductive and biased. It inevitably leaves something out. Within the marketing strategy, consumer segmentation effectively reduces people to statistical surface-level traits such as demographics and geographic location. In the instance of Rock City, the myth and narrative are presented through visual tactics of signage, mapping, and advertising as well as physical objects such as souvenirs.

Souvenirs are an extension of the monetization process outside of the space itself—creating a sense of exclusivity and membership that comes from having a unique experience of place. More than the material record, tourism is increasingly becoming about selling the experience or journey over the place itself. It is not necessarily a tangible souvenir that the visitor takes home, but rather an intangible experience, one that can be shared on social media or anecdotally to friends and family. In the case of Rock City, Jackson explained that their primary goal is to create an experience, activated and advanced through small moments of pleasure and discovery. The souvenirs themselves are tied to the success of experience marketing as Jackson expressed how, for the company, a position in daily life is a position of honor; it implies that the experience was meaningful, "a worthy enough experience

[60] Ibid.

that it might land on the fridge right beside the kids' art."[61] Just as Hiroshige's prints became commodified representations of a destination, the "wonders" of Rock City become a magnets on a fridge.

Figure H: Photo from personal visit to Rock City souvenir shop on 5 March 2021.

After the traveler is guided to the end of their journey through Rock City—exiting through the gift shop—the experience is complete. If the experience was impactful enough or if there is enough social prestige associated with the place, then the traveler likely purchased a souvenir or a photo in front of the See Rock City sign. Post-visit, the traveler reflects on their experience and compares it with their expectation and with the experience of others. The tourist then subconsciously accepts or ignores the constructed nature of the exposure and experience.

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[61] Jackson.

VII. See This Rock

In “See This Rock,” I appropriated Rock City’s promotional tactics and rhetoric to echo the tourism industry’s strategy to build constructed environments and experiences. Through the employment of similar tactics that manipulate an individual’s experience before, during, and after visiting, I built a campaign around a rock. The phrase “See This Rock” subtly modifies the historic, simple message of “See Rock City” and recreates it using the iconic bold white font on black. In the gallery, I leveraged repetition and commercial legitimacy through a tangible token, to position the rock as art and to manufacture collectively established value for a mundane natural object.

See this rock.

The repeated message can be seen in unsuspecting locations around the university campus.

See this rock.

Figure I: Personal photo at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga on 24 March 2021.

Again and again there is a call to action; the repeated message suggests that this rock must be something worth seeing. The signage campaign also suggests a commercial legitimacy as the signs are simple yet clear and are printed on a heavy-weight paper with a slight gloss to the surface. During the first stage of exposure, the same visual strategy is consistent throughout and generates an anticipation or excitement about the prospect of a significant experience of a spectacle.

Figure J: Personal photo at the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga on 15 April 2021.

In the gallery, painted on an eight-foot by eight-foot wall is a hand-painted “See This Rock.” Its white letters contrast starkly with the black background of the wall and borrow from the visual strategies of Rock City. Set against this backdrop is a white pedestal on top of which sets a single rock small enough to fit in the palm of an adult hand. The rock is neither spectacular nor uninteresting. Its surface boasts distinct lines of color that accentuate the layers, a small patch of green, and sparkling mineral fragments. There is no other rock on earth that looks exactly like this one. At the same time, though, there are thousands of rocks that look similar. But because I chose to elevate the rock through a series of designed steps, that rock is significant. In effect, the campaign itself is more significant when defining what the viewer sees than the rock when determining what the viewer should see and experience. By inverting expectations, the viewer is left with only the systems that brought them to the rock, and their judgment on whether or not they believe the rock to be worth it.

Figure K: Personal photo at the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga on 15 April 2021.

Directing movement within the gallery space is a vinyl sticker on the floor next to the “See This Rock" wall. The sticker has an arrow pointing to the opposite side of the wall above the words “See More.” This not only serves as a direct influence on the viewer’s movement within the space, but also affects the viewer’s sense of place. From the planted exposure outside the gallery, to the spectacle in the gallery, to the formation of a holistic experience, the designer plays an active role in the movement of the individual through a constructed space, thus placemaking through the insertion of voice. “See more” encourages the viewer to act on their curiosity and their desire to participate in a collective activity. The word “more” also implies that there is something beyond what is on the surface; that perhaps the rock offers a new perspective on the everyday world around them.

Figure L: Personal photo at the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga on 15 April 2021.

On the backside of the gallery wall is a series of posters in different print and production styles. Below the posters, another pedestal holds a selection of three stickers with directions beneath indicating "Please take a sticker to remember your experience." One sticker has the phrase "I Saw It" in the same white lettering on black. The second has a white silhouette of the rock and the third lists the dimensions of the rock in white on a black background. The stickers are intentionally vague. The stickers represent the takeaway or souvenir that the tourist purchases at the end of their experience at a location. It is an informal memento that can go virtually anywhere, and its primary purpose is a social tool. The sticker can either function as a conversation starter or associate the individual with a group or type of image. The sticker incites a feeling of exclusivity and group membership in that the only ones who understand are the ones who directly experienced the spectacle. It also fosters a sense of identity as it links the individual to the location's brand attributes and image.

The overall effect of the backside of the wall is one of total appropriation. The viewer now takes a step back and realizes the infrastructures and systems by which tourism manipulates movement and forms value judgments on behalf of the consumer. The experience is commodified and mass produced in varying formats. The brand itself becomes the subject of interest and the evaluation becomes a matter of individual identification with the sensory experience. In seeing more, the viewer is now directly involved with the promotion and value construction of the exhibit. The "See This Rock" installation brings the stages of tourism—exposure, experience, and evaluation—into the gallery space and disarms them through humor. The play on words encourages the viewer to truly look at the subject of the campaign and the beauty of such a simple rock, while at the same time, encourages the viewer to evaluate the experience that tourism and marketing tactics create in order to create value for an object or place.

If one can truly break down the infrastructure and invisible systems which direct movement in society, if design practices that guide the viewer along a mediated path can be uncovered, if we as global citizens can become aware of how an experience is bought and sold like a commercial good, then what? As Shannon Mattern, anthropology professor at The New School in New York City, writes, "the ambitious intentions to 'make visible the invisible' and raise awareness of imperceptible systems, much like Situationist-style dérives or interventions, can too often become ends in themselves."[62] Is it enough to call into question "what it means to travel along a particular infrastructure, and about how it delimits our perceptions and experiences of the landscape"?[63] Infrastructures, urban landscapes, and even tourist destinations are always evolving and adapting in response to the shifting structures

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[62] Shannon Mattern, "Infrastructural Tourism," *Places Journal*, July 2013.

[63] Ibid.

around them. Design can be both a way to decode and encode these changes. The goal of this paper and the exhibition is to encourage critical thinking, to cause the viewer to think about the degree of autonomy they have in the perception of a space or experience. Even a small shift in perception, such as that of drawing attention back to a single relatively unimportant rock, can ripple into a larger framework shift, one in which mindfulness and autonomy play an active role in the creation and interpretation of spaces.

See This Rock.

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